Gay-benefits backers suspect double standard

Fire pensions may figure in suit

By ED SEALOVER
THE GAZETTE

When Colorado Springs City Council members defended their decision to subsidize the Fire Department's pension plan last month, they referred to it as a matter of honor.

Yet when the council voted in 2003 to rescind health benefits to same-sex partners of city employees, the decision was justified as a matter of principle and economics.

Now, gay rights activists and an attorney who is suing the city over the benefits revocation say the two situations are similar — but with different endings and a double standard.

In one case, attorney Trish Bangert noted, the city had a $6,000 annual obligation to same-sex couples that it discontinued. In the other, it decided to honor an increase in fire pension benefits despite a mistake by the staff that left the city with a $5.1 million bill for its decision.

"It's a moral issue to the firefighters... but it's perfectly OK to go back on your word for gays and lesbians," Bangert said.

Council members said the two situations are different. Their reasoning varies, but a common theme is that pensions are contractual agreements with longtime workers, while same-sex benefits were freebies for nonemployees.

"One was a longstanding commitment to public safety employees in the city of Colorado Springs," Councilman Scott Hente said. "The other was an obligation I didn't think should have been made in the first place."

A previous council approved the same-sex benefits in 2002, but a newly elected body featuring eight of the nine current members said it would cancel them at its first meeting in April 2003.

Two weeks ago, two lesbian couples sued the city, saying the city violated their First Amendment and equality

SEE GAY SUIT • PAGE 2

2/16

Cancer Control for Women in Their Forties
St. Mary-Corwin Medical Center: Pueblo, Colo. **$43,000**
Screening mammograms and diagnostic follow up for women ages 40 to 49 who are uninsured or have limited financial resources

Clinical Trials: Minority Recruitment Strategies
St. Mary-Corwin Medical Center: Pueblo, Colo. **$15,300**
Explores factors involved in the successful recruitment of Hispanic women for breast cancer trials and to identify resources for education about clinical trials among Hispanic women

Community Mammography Project
El Paso County Health Department & Environmental: Colorado Springs, Colo. **$70,000**
Comprehensive breast cancer exams, screening mammograms and diagnostic follow up for low-income or uninsured women under the age of 50

Complementary Therapy Access for Breast Cancer Patients
Memorial Hospital Cancer Center: Colorado Springs, Colo. **$5,275**
Complementary, holistic and integrative therapy (such as relaxation training, yoga, massage, exercise Reiki, smoking cessation and acupressure) for breast cancer patients undergoing conventional medical treatment to help enhance quality of life

Financial Treatment Support
Sense of Security: Broomfield, Colo. **$20,000**
Nonmedical financial support for breast cancer patients in El Paso, Pueblo and Teller counties who need assistance with housing, utilities, transportation, food, medical insurance premiums or child care during treatment

Genetic Counseling for High Risk Women
Penrose Cancer Center: Colorado Springs, Colo. **$30,185**
Genetic counseling and breast cancer risk analysis for women

services for breast cancer patients, including medical massage, yoga, music therapy, art therapy and journaling

Latina Breast Health Outreach Initiative: JUNTAS Contra el Cancer del Seno
Penrose Cancer Center: Colorado Springs, Colo. **$40,000**
Bilingual breast health education, screening and case management services for Latinas • Culturally sensitive outreach by Promotroas (women who promotes health) is used to identify and remove barriers to screenings and treatment.

Lymphedema Services
St. Mary-Corwin Medical Center: Pueblo, Colo. **$7,300**
Lymphedema prevention education for women following breast cancer surgery and financial support for lymphedema treatment for uninsured women

Pikes Peak Breast Health Connection
El Paso County Department of Health & Environment: Colorado Springs, Colo. **$15,000**
Communication clearinghouse for breast cancer providers in the Pikes Peak region that promotes public awareness of breast health screening, education and outreach services, includes a hot line number at 578-3111

Pikes Peak Library: Breast Cancer Resource Center
Pikes Peak Library: Colorado Springs, Colo. **$20,000**
A dedicated space with comprehensive educational resources on the topic of breast cancer, including internet access in English and Spanish, a directory of local resources, telephone with access to national and local resources, and a collection of written materials that are culturally sensitive to patrons of all ages, ethnic backgrounds and education levels

Breast Care Help line:
1-800 I'M AWARE

Advertising donated by:
The Gazette
Bringing it home

Komen Colorado Springs Race for the Cure®
Sunday, September 11, 2005
Iron Horse Park, Fort Carson
Call 476-1675
www.csraceforthecure.org
003

GAY SUIT: 2 cases differ, council members say

FROM PAGE 1

rights by taking away the benefits.

In January, city staffers said a pension benefits increase to firefighters would cost $10.2 million more than was expected when the council approved it in concept. Given the opportunity to scale back the benefits, council members said they had to honor their commitment to the employees.

After reading about the pension issue, Ryan Acker, director of the Pikes Peak Gay and Lesbian Center, said the more recent decision felt hypocritical. The same-sex employee partners hadn't just been promised benefits as the firefighters had — they had been given them and had them taken away.

Bangert hinted this week she might use these differing reactions in her lawsuit, which seeks reinstatement of the same-sex benefits.

"The only difference in these cases is that one group is gay and the other is not," she said.

Council members, however, cited several differences in the cases.

Mayor Lionel Rivera said the current council cannot be bound to the decisions of previous councils.

Councilman Jerry Heimlicher pointed out that employee benefits are subject to annual reviews in which changes to premiums and certain treatments are made.

Councilman Larry Small added that the firefighters have been paying into their pension funds from their salaries, and the domestic partners benefits called for no such contributions.

The city's attorneys have yet to respond to the lawsuit.

approval

By SHARI CHANEY
THE GAZETTE

A recently created state board will meet in Colorado Springs on Monday to consider four applications for charter schools in the Pikes Peak region.

By fall, the area could see as many as seven new charter schools.

Four charter schools were approved last year by local school boards, and four groups applied to the state Charter